

Confabulations of History: William Faulkner, Edgar Francisco, and a Friendship that Never Was

by Jack D. Elliott Jr.

And when he came to understand what it meant he was so taken with it that he began to retail the story himself, until at last he must come to believe he really had. Anyway he related long pointless anecdotes of his undergraduate days, speaking familiarly of dead and departed professors by their first names, usually incorrect ones.

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

On February 11, 2010, the *New York Times* announced that a set of antebellum plantation ledgers had possibly served as a major influence on the work of the writer William Faulkner by providing “the source for myriad names, incidents and details that populate his fictionalized Yoknapatawpha County.”¹ The ledgers had been kept by north Mississippi planter Francis Terry Leak (ca. 1803–1863) from the late 1830s through the early 1860s and consisted primarily of diary-like entries along with business records.² The ledgers are now in the Southern

¹ Patricia Cohen, “Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered,” *New York Times*, February 10, 2010, accessed November 19, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/11/books/11faulkner.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. This article was probably stimulated by the publication of Sally Wolff, “William Faulkner and the Ledgers of History,” *Southern Literary Journal* 42 (Fall 2009): 1–16, which first announced the discovery.

² The ledgers are sometimes referred to as “diaries” and in fact the bulk of them consists of entries of a diary nature. However, other parts are simply records of business matters.

JACK D. ELLIOTT JR. is an adjunct professor at Mississippi State University—Meridian, where he teaches courses in archaeology, geography, and religion. The author wishes to thank Seth Berner, Marcus Gray, Stephen Slimp, Brian Fennessy, Justin Randolph, Jane Isbell Haynes, Robert Hamblin, Hubert McAlexander, Maria Bustillos, and Frank Hurdle.

Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. The discovery was announced by Faulkner scholar Dr. Sally Wolff of Emory University, who stated that “[t]he diary and a number of family stories seem to have provided the philosophical and thematic power for some of his major works.” According to the *New York Times* article, scholars “have been stunned and intrigued not only by this peephole into Faulkner’s working process, but also by material that may have inspired this Nobel-prize-winning author.” John Lowe of Louisiana State University called it “one of the most sensational literary discoveries of recent decades.”³ The excitement over the discovery was rapidly disseminated through the media.⁴ In September 2010, Wolff’s book *Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Plantation Diary* (hereafter *Ledgers*) was published, presenting the authoritative version of the discovery.⁵ A lecture at the Library of Congress followed soon after.⁶

Although the ledgers caused significant excitement, in reality their connection to Faulkner was not self-evident. Instead, the relevance of these ledgers to Faulkner’s life was based on the claims of the great-

I use the term “ledgers” because of its more comprehensive definition.

³ Cohen, “Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered.”

⁴ The day after the release of the *New York Times* article, February 11, 2010, Sally Wolff was interviewed by Melissa Block and Michele Norris on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*, in an episode entitled “Plantation Diary Yields Clues to Faulkner’s Work,” NPR, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123614264>.

On the same day (February 11, 2010), Emory University issued a news release “Finding Faulkner with a ‘Once in a Lifetime’ Discovery,” accessed March 13, 2014, <http://shared.web.emory.edu/emory/news/releases/2010/02/finding-faulkner-with-a-once-in-lifetime-discovery.html#.UyHzzr8t8OUk>. A few days later the editorial board of Emory’s student-run newspaper *Emory Wheel* applauded the “positive national attention” brought to the university and predicted that “from now on, whenever scholars and students study Faulkner, they will encounter a contribution from Emory.” See “Our Opinion: Emory’s Faulkner Connection,” *Emory Wheel*, February 15, 2010, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.emorywheel.com/archive/detail.php?n=28001>.

Alison Flood, “Newly Discovered Plantation Diary Was Key Inspiration for Faulkner’s Novels, Says Academic,” *Guardian*, February 12, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/12/plantation-diary-inspiration-faulkner-novels>, and Allison Adams, “A Diary’s Secrets,” *Emory Magazine* 86, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 6–7.

⁵ Sally Wolff, *Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Plantation Diary* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

⁶ Sally Wolff, “William Faulkner and the Ledgers of History,” lecture presented at the Library of Congress, August 9, 2011. YouTube, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUK698jJbmU>.

great-grandson of F.T. Leak, Edgar Wiggin Francisco III (born 1930, hereafter referred to as Francisco or EWF3 to distinguish him from his father), a native of Holly Springs, Marshall County, Mississippi, now living in Georgia. Beginning in March 2008, Francisco was interviewed extensively by Wolff, and about half of *Ledgers* consists of transcripts of these interviews which presented—often in considerable detail—what are purported to be his memories and tales told by his father, Edgar W. Francisco Jr. (1897–1966, hereafter usually referred to as Edgar). In these interviews, he reveals what he claims to have been a decades-long friendship between Faulkner and the elder Francisco, the “Almost Forgotten Friendship” alluded to in the book’s subtitle, a friendship that by the book’s account had a formative effect on Faulkner’s writing, and that brought the writer into contact with the Leak ledgers. The claims made by Francisco are audacious and if true would be of considerable significance to Faulkner scholarship. However, the question that was seldom asked was, *are* the claims true?

“Tell Me Again, Edgar”

According to Francisco’s testimony, the friendship between Faulkner and Edgar Francisco began as early as 1899, when the two families would meet to celebrate the respective birthdays of the two boys.⁷ Over the years the two continued to visit and spent time riding ponies and hunting together. Most of the visits seem to involve Faulkner coming to Holly Springs, with nothing said about Edgar visiting Oxford. In Holly Springs the Francisco family resided in their home McCarroll Place on Van Dorn Avenue. The home took its name from the earliest family members to reside there, Mr. and Mrs. John R. McCarroll, and at the turn of the last century it housed an extended family of McCarroll descendants.⁸

⁷ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 75. EWF3 places these initial visits in New Albany, Mississippi, where Faulkner was born in 1897, not seeming to realize that the Falkners lived in Ripley from 1899 until 1902. He makes no mention of Ripley nor of celebrating the birthdays of the younger Falkner boys, nor did the younger Falkner boys, Murry and John, ever recall the Franciscos. See John Faulkner, *My Brother Bill: An Affectionate Reminiscence* (New York: Trident Press, 1963); Murry C. Falkner, *The Falkners of Mississippi: A Memoir* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

⁸ John Ramsey McCarroll (ca. 1803–1873) and his wife Elizabeth C. Eddins McCarroll (ca. 1814–1872) first began residing at McCarroll Place before the Civil War. In 1900 resident family members included Edgar W. Francisco Sr. (1867–1940), his wife Betsy

During the 1920s Edgar Francisco and William Faulkner attended dances in Holly Springs with their dates.⁹ After their marriages, both in 1929, Faulkner continued to visit McCarroll Place, where his visits involved poring over the Leak ledgers and socializing with Edgar. The visits continued through about 1939, when the two began to drift apart.¹⁰

From his earliest days at McCarroll Place, Faulkner had listened to Edgar's older McCarroll relatives who lived with the Franciscos: "As boys, he and Dad would have listened to Grandmother Amelia's and Aunt Sallie's stories Aunt Sallie told stories, but Gramaw Amelia was the real storyteller. Dad would sit for hours and listen to Gramaw tell stories."¹¹ After the deaths of the two women, Edgar continued telling the stories.¹² As EWF3 recalled, "Dad was very much filled with the story of the family and the Civil War, and he grew up on it. So when he talked about an event, you could think it must be just happening, but it could be something his grandmother told him happened in 1865 or in 1870. He seemed to live on those stories. So I'm sure that Faulkner was very much aware of these stories during the '20s. Those were probably the main years he was picking them up."¹³ Edgar "talked of eighty-year-old events as if they happened that morning."¹⁴ During these storytelling sessions "Faulkner seemed to love to sit there and scribble with his pen and record them ... It was as if he could listen all day to Edgar's stories. That's sort of the relationship they had—Dad telling the story, and Faulkner would say, 'Tell me again, Edgar.' He would ask to have some story repeated, and Dad was happy to tell it again."¹⁵ "Faulkner had a huge imagination and could create a short story out of a much briefer story that Dad would tell him."¹⁶

Leak Francisco (1869–1931), and their two children, Edgar Francisco Jr. and Amelia Belle Francisco (born 1894). Also residing there were Betsy's mother, Amelia McCarroll Leak (ca. 1842–1909), the daughter of John R. McCarroll and the daughter-in-law of F. T. Leak, and Amelia's two unmarried sisters, Elizabeth "Bettie" McCarroll (ca. 1853–1913) and Sarah "Sally" McCarroll (ca. 1840–1917). From the US censuses for Marshall County, Mississippi, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, and from headstone inscriptions in Hill Crest Cemetery, Holly Springs.

⁹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 78–79, 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90, 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹² *Ibid.*, 75, 82, 118, 140–41, 166.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

In addition to listening to Francisco family lore, Faulkner was also fascinated by the Leak ledgers:

Probably he was the only person who had really read these diaries since they were written—which is sort of amazing, really. Equally amazing, the bundle of diaries remained wrapped up and undisturbed from about 1872 to Faulkner’s discovery of them sometime in the 1920s—over fifty years later. He read and took notes over about a ten- to fifteen-year period. They were back in the drawer until donated and typed.¹⁷

Then Will would pull out notes and ask for a particular volume of the diary and turn to the page he wanted. Then he seemed to totally change. He became sober, focused, sometimes agitated and angry, and talked to the writer of the diary. Thinking of it now, it was as if he were back with Francis Terry Leak, as Leak was writing, and Will talked angrily to him. He was in conversation with Leak, to the total exclusion of Dad and me.¹⁸

The thrust of the testimony is that the Francisco family and the ledgers played a seminal role in Faulkner’s writing career through providing background information for what would become Yoknapatawpha County. As EWF3 noted, “He used a lot of material from right around here, and his first short stories were about McCarroll Place.”¹⁹ Not least of the purported influences was a girl’s name, Ludie, etched into a glass window probably in the 1860s, which supposedly influenced several of Faulkner’s novels.

I was initially intrigued by the announcement of the discovery of Francisco and his testimony, opening what appeared to be a window into a bygone time. However, based on my own experience with oral history I soon became uneasy with the testimony. Much was related with a quasi-omniscience, recalling details of century-old conversations and answering questions with the self-assuredness of someone who had only recently witnessed the events. This indeed raises questions—especially when virtually no corroboration is offered—suggesting as it does the possibility of fabrication.

Credible testimonies involve points of intersection with known facts. While there is a framework of basic genealogical data (names and dates)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

and some memories of personal history, the greater bulk of the testimony offers little intersection with known facts. This includes the central focus of the transcripts, namely the friendship between Edgar Francisco Jr. and William Faulkner which purportedly lasted for four decades. Despite the fact that Faulkner's life has been thoroughly documented by biographies, interviews, reminiscences by family members and acquaintances, and published correspondence, there is not one reference to the Francisco family in this material, nor are there known references in the *Oxford Eagle* newspaper or in the Ripley newspapers.²⁰ *Ledgers* provides no corroborative evidence nor does it even acknowledge that the absence of such might have a bearing on the credibility of the testimony.²¹

Indeed, Sally Wolff hardly addresses the problem of credibility, assuming perhaps that the testimony of someone who "hold[s] six degrees

²⁰ Major sources that would be likely to reference the Francisco family, but do not, include: Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974); Joseph Blotner, ed., *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1977); Louis D. Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin (eds.), *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the Brodsky Collection*, vol. 2, *The Letters* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984); Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); James G. Watson, ed., *Thinking of Home: William Faulkner's Letters to His Mother and Father, 1918–1925* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992); and the aforementioned John Faulkner, *My Brother Bill*, and Murry C. Falkner, *The Falkners of Mississippi: A Memoir*.

Specific mention should be made of Robert Cantwell, "The Faulkners: Recollections of a Gifted Family," in M. Thomas Inge, ed., *Conversations with William Faulkner* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 30–41. Cantwell recalled a lengthy visit with Faulkner in 1938 and also a ride in which the two discussed the land, its history, and Faulkner's fiction. Although they passed through Holly Springs nothing was said about the family and home that were according to the Francisco testimony at the heart of the writer's inspiration.

Regarding newspapers, I have perused every known extant newspaper from Ripley, Mississippi, for the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. For the *Oxford Eagle* see James B. Lloyd (compiler), *The Oxford Eagle, 1900–1962: An Annotated Checklist of Material on William Faulkner and the History of Lafayette County* (Mississippi State University: *Mississippi Quarterly*, 1977). I have personally perused the *Oxford Eagle* issues from 1902 through 1925 and November 1936 through January 1938.

²¹ By EWF3's account his family preserved a wealth of documents: "The house was filled with stacks of documents, diaries, and letters that filled drawers, shelves, and boxes. Dad's mother had saved boxes of clippings and letters from the same time period, including letters her mother had received. Grandfather Francisco apparently saved most letters he received, neatly bundled by year from 1910 to 1939—thousands of them, filed away and never read again. He had maintained a huge correspondence." *Ledgers*, 136. If this was indeed the case, with all of this material available one wonders why not a single photograph, letter, or newspaper clipping was presented as evidence of Faulkner's connection to McCarroll Place.

from several academic institutions” and who is “shy, courteous, and modest” is perhaps beyond reproach.²² I do not know Edgar Wiggin Francisco III. I do not question that he might seem credible or that he might even believe his statements. However, in and of itself the truth of his testimony is not compelling, as we shall see.

The Origin of the Ledgers

The claim that William Faulkner frequently used and was influenced by the Leak ledgers is based on the proposition that they were actually at McCarroll Place during his purported visits prior to their being donated to the Southern Historical Collection in 1946. Upon examination this proposition appears to be questionable.

The ledgers were presumably composed at the home of F.T. Leak on his plantation in Tippah County (now in Benton County), Mississippi. After Leak’s death, his son Walter John Leak married Amelia McCarroll, the daughter of J.R. McCarroll. A few years later, in 1872, Walter John died, leaving Amelia to return to her family home in Holly Springs along with her young daughter Betsy, who would later marry E.W. Francisco Sr. According to EWF3, Amelia brought the Leak ledgers to Holly Springs and placed them “in a bottom drawer” at McCarroll Place where they lay virtually untouched for almost half a century until they were discovered by Faulkner in the 1920s and used for “about a ten- to fifteen-year period.”²³ Afterward they were occasionally displayed during pilgrimage tours of the house.²⁴ Then, according to Wolff, the Francisco family in 1946 “agreed to give the original, handwritten copy of the ‘Diary of Francis Terry Leak’ to the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; in return, the family asked the library to prepare a typed transcription of the original and give Edgar Francisco Jr. a set of the bound volumes.”²⁵ That is, at any rate, Francisco’s version of the story.

In this light, one who peruses the typescripts of the ledgers will be surprised to read on the title page of each that they were “Copied from

²² Wolff, *Ledgers*, xi.

²³ *Ibid.*, 104–5, 110, 143.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

originals given by/ Mrs. Gerard Badow/Holly Springs/Mississippi"; there is no reference to the Franciscos having in any way been the donors. Perle Strickland Badow was a cousin of the Franciscos and their next-door neighbor, living at Strickland Place on the east side of McCarroll Place; she was also a Leak descendant by virtue of her mother Janie Leak Strickland being the sister of Walter John Leak. According to Sally Wolff, EWF3 claimed that when the representative of the Southern Historical Collection came to Holly Springs looking for manuscripts he found the ledgers in the possession of Edgar Francisco Jr., who was initially reluctant to donate them. Somewhat later he had a change of heart and decided to donate them, but passed them to cousin Perle next door, and she gave them to the representative, and in so doing she was the one who received recognition for the donation.²⁶ This explanation seems contrived.

Regardless, the story falls apart upon inspection of the records of Joseph G. de Roulhac Hamilton, the representative and founder of the Southern Historical Collection. It was he who located and acquired the ledger for the Collection. On November 19, 1944, Hamilton drove from Memphis to Holly Springs and spent much of the day pursuing leads, one of whom, a Mrs. Gholson,²⁷ told him that he should visit the Badow home, Strickland Place. About this he writes:

From there went to see Mrs. Gerard Badow. Mrs. Gholson told me to be sure and see her. Found a funny and very nice elderly woman, married to a pleasant German in a rat's nest of a house. She is, by descent, one of the Anson County, N.C. Leakes. She has a perfectly gorgeous plantation diary in several volumes. I offered copies [i.e. he offered to give her transcribed copies in exchange for the originals] and I think she came very near letting me bring them along. But she decided to think it over and I'm to write her. They were kept by Francis Terry Leake who came here from North Carolina.²⁸

²⁶ Telephone communications with Sally Wolff, July 4 and September 18, 2013.

²⁷ "Mrs. Gholson" was apparently the wife of the Dr. Norman Glasgow Gholson (1875-1951) whom Hamilton had visited earlier that day: "I went to see Dr. Gholson. He has been paralyzed and is very pathetic. He has none of his father's papers." Dr. Gholson was a member of an old Holly Springs family, and his wife was Eliza McNeel Penick Gholson (1879-1949).

²⁸ Joseph G. de R. Hamilton, diary entry, November 19, 1944, Series 3, Diaries, Joseph Gregoire de Roulhac Hamilton Papers, 1895-1961, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collection Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

It is clear that this visit was Hamilton's first contact with Mrs. Badow and his first encounter with the ledgers. Although he mentioned visiting several residents of Holly Springs in regard to their possibly owning manuscripts of interest, the Franciscos were never mentioned, which stands in contrast to EWF3's story that Hamilton had initially found the ledgers in his father's possession. Furthermore, upon subsequent visits to Holly Springs on May 3, 1946, and April 9, 1948, Hamilton never mentioned the Franciscos, strongly suggesting that they had nothing that he was interested in and calling into question EWF3's claim that his father was the one who was first approached about donating the diaries.²⁹

Subsequent to his first visit, Hamilton sent Mrs. Badow a letter on January 9, 1945, promising to give her four typescript copies of the ledgers if she would donate the originals to the collection. He noted that these copies would allow "several members of a family ... to have copies of the diary in attractive and easily read form."³⁰ On May 3, 1946, he returned to Holly Springs to retrieve the ledgers and noted that instead of four copies the Badows "only want two copies."³¹ Hamilton's statement coincides with accession records from the Wilson Library of UNC-CH, which indicate that one copy of the typescript volumes went to the Badows and one to the Franciscos.³² So it appears that Mrs. Badow requested two copies, one for herself and the other for the Franciscos, which explains the copies in the possession of EWF3. Yet instead of acknowledging Perle's role in the donation and for requesting typescripts for the Franciscos, EWF3 claimed that his father was the real donor. Regardless, Hamilton's diaries make clear that the ledgers were in Perle Badow's possession when he first encountered them and that Edgar Francisco had no role in the donation.

²⁹ Hamilton, diary entries, May 3, 1946, and April 9, 1948.

³⁰ Letter, Joseph G. de R. Hamilton to Mrs. Gerard Badow of Holly Springs, Mississippi, January 9, 1945, Series 1, Correspondence, 1885–1961, Joseph Gregoire de Rouilhac Hamilton Papers, 1895–1961, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collection Library, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill.

³¹ Hamilton, diary entry, May 3, 1946.

³² "Two typed copies of the diary, all completed in 1955, were sent to Mr. Gerard Badow, Greenville, Miss. One of these will go to his cousin, Mr. Edgar Francisco, Holly Springs, Miss., and the other will eventually go to the Univ. of Miss." Accession sheet for the Francis Terry Leak collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collection Library, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. Having died in 1948, Perle Badow never saw most of the transcribed volumes; Gerard Badow (1879–1956), remarried by this time to Caroline Metcalfe (1895–1981), moved to his new wife's home in Greenville, Mississippi, where he died a few years later. Badow was buried in the Greenville Cemetery.

Furthermore, Hubert H. McAlexander, who is in a unique position to speak to the problem at hand, has recently provided additional insight into the ownership of the ledgers. Born in 1939, McAlexander grew up in Holly Springs, a member of an old family. He knew Edgar and Ruth Francisco and their son Edgar III. McAlexander has published several historical works on Holly Springs and Marshall County and has written a dissertation on Faulkner while teaching his writings for decades.³³ Regarding the ledgers he has written:

In the 1960s, I borrowed from Ruth Bitzer Francisco the typed copies of the Francis Terry Leak plantation ledgers, which the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provided I had known the chain-smoking but charming Ruth Bitzer Francisco rather well through the Presbyterian church. She told me at the time that the original ledgers had been given to Chapel Hill by Perle Strickland Badow, Leak's granddaughter, who saw to it that her cousins, the Franciscos, also Leak descendants, were given a copy. I went through the copies making various historical notes If there were any connections between ... [Faulkner's works] and the ledgers, I would have noted them long ago.³⁴

McAlexander then found no reason to believe that the Franciscos had ever owned the manuscript ledgers nor did he find any evidence that Faulkner had used them. All indications are that during the early twentieth century they were in the possession of Perle Badow, who probably inherited them from her mother, Janie Leak Strickland, who was the daughter of the ledgers' author F. T. Leak. Janie moved to Holly Springs about the time of her marriage to attorney William M. Strickland (1823–1908) on May 1, 1867, a few years after her father's death.

The question that comes to mind is: Did the Franciscos *ever* possess the ledgers? The earliest reliable information for their being in Holly Springs places them in the possession of Perle Strickland Badow in November 1944. Because her mother was the daughter of the ledgers'

³³ Hubert McAlexander is Josiah Meigs Professor Emeritus, Department of English, University of Georgia. His work includes "History as Perception, History as Obsession: Faulkner's Development of a Theme" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1973); *A Southern Tapestry: Marshall County, Mississippi, 1835-2000* (Virginia Beach VA: The Donning Company, 2000); "The Saga of a Mixed-Blood Chickasaw Dynasty," *Journal of Mississippi History* 49 (1987), 288-289; and "General Earl Van Dorn and Faulkner's Use of History," *Journal of Mississippi History* 39 (1977), 357-361.

³⁴ Email correspondence, Hubert H. McAlexander to Jack D. Elliott Jr., March 18, 2014.

author, it seems reasonable that she could have received them from her mother. On the other hand, EWF3 claims that they had been in his family's possession since Amelia McCarroll Leak had returned to Holly Springs following her husband's death in 1872. However, given that Francisco's credibility has been marred by his claims regarding the donation of the ledgers, it appears more likely that the ledgers were where they were first documented, that is in the possession of Perle Badow, and not Edgar Francisco.

The Evidence of the Ledgers

A recurrent theme in the Francisco testimony was Faulkner's fascination with the Leak ledgers, to which over a period of years he devoted an enormous amount of time, obsessively poring over and taking extensive notes from them, presumably to be used in his writing. We might ask if the ledgers actually "provided the philosophical and thematic power for some of his major works," as Wolff has suggested,³⁵ and if so whether or not this is self-evident.

Following EWF3's claims that Faulkner heavily utilized the ledgers in his stories, Wolff presents a litany of items that seem to suggest an influence on Faulkner.³⁶ I will examine a sample of these.

Faulkner's references to the physical appearance of the diary [in *Go Down, Moses*] match precisely that of the old Leak Diary, written in brown, thin, fading ink, Faulkner apparently was literally describing the old Leak ledger books with their odd, irregular sizes and their cracked, yellow, leather bindings.³⁷

Having used nineteenth-century ledgers from Mississippi for decades, I find nothing in Faulkner's descriptions that would not apply to almost any set of ledgers from that time period.

Much is made over similarities between personal names in Faulkner's work and names in the Leak ledgers.³⁸ The following provides an example:

Old Rose, Henry, Charles, Tom, Ellen, and Milly were slaves

³⁵ Sally Wolff, quoted in Cohen, "Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered."

³⁶ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 16–49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18, 20–22, 28, 31–38.

on the Leak plantation In *Absalom, Absalom!* the character Milly is the daughter of the man who will eventually murder the plantation owner. Rose, Ellen, and Milly are common southern names, to be sure, and they are slave names in this and other diaries of the time, but in the Leak Diary they appear close together in the slave lists. Perhaps their names and circumstances caught Faulkner's attention and prompted him to imagine their lives more fully. They seem to be strong prototypes for the major female figures of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Charles Bonner is a less common name that appears in the Leak Diary with a parallel—slightly shortened to “Charles Bon”—in Faulkner's novel ...

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Henry and Charles, the sons of Thomas Sutpen, are crucial characters. In the Leak Diary, Henry and Charles are slaves whose names appear next to each other in several Leak slave lists ...³⁹

Here we have six fairly common names from the ledgers that are then matched with names from *Absalom*. When one considers, however, that Leak had fifty slaves on his Mississippi plantation in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses, that provides quite a few names to be matched with fairly common names from *Absalom*. The implication is that Faulkner was unable to come up with common names on his own and was reduced to copying them from the ledgers.

Early in *Absalom, Absalom!* Thomas Sutpen and his slaves begin to build Sutpen's grand plantation house. Faulkner appears to have derived some of the details of that project from Leak's description of how his plantation house was constructed ...⁴⁰

The details provided from the Leak ledgers are comparable to what would have been found in any description of the construction of a large house. *Absalom* on the other hand does not provide nearly the level of detail—its description of the construction of the Sutpen house does not appear to bear any distinctive characteristics of the Leak house construction.

Leak's slaves make tens of thousands of bricks ... Leak ...

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21–22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

prepares “the Kiln” ... Likewise, Faulkner writes in *Absalom* that ‘Sutpen had built a brick kiln’ ...⁴¹

Regarding antebellum houses, stories are still common today about how the brick were made and burned on the site of the respective home. These stories were even more common in the 1920s and 1930s and would have been familiar to Faulkner. He certainly did not need to resort to the Leak ledgers to find out about brick kilns.

Leak buries his dead in the family cemetery ... and “sets out four Cedar trees” there. Faulkner’s Sutpen likewise has his own family cemetery among the cedars.⁴²

During the nineteenth century cedar trees were commonly used in landscaping both in yards and cemeteries. Faulkner would have known of this practice from many places, including his own home Rowan Oak and the Oxford Cemetery.

Legal terminology used in the diary finds its way into the novel [*Absalom, Absalom!*]. Francis Terry Leak was a lawyer ... and frequently uses terms like “Quit claim deed” or “Quit claim title” ... Legal terms ... appear in both Leak’s and Faulkner’s texts. In *Absalom*, Thomas Sutpen uses a number of these terms⁴³

Faulkner came from a long line of attorneys that included T. J. Word, J.W. Thompson, W.C. Falkner, James Word Falkner Sr., J.W.T. Falkner Sr., J.W.T. Falkner Jr., J.W.T. Falkner IV, and M.C. “Jack” Falkner, while one of his best friends and a key mentor was attorney Phil Stone; legal jargon would not have been uncommon in Faulkner’s social circle.

The diary, with its enumeration of such needed farm equipment as trace chains, halter chains, hames, and a cross-cut saw, may have provided Faulkner with some of the realistic detail found in *The Hamlet*.⁴⁴

Faulkner’s father operated at various times a hardware store and a livery stable in Oxford. In 1938 Faulkner purchased a farm where he operated a commissary for the tenants and raised mules. Farm hardware would not have been unfamiliar to him.

⁴¹ Ibid., 23.

⁴² Ibid., 24.

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 28.

The Leak Diary mentions sawmills and gristmills ... [the] mills suggest the one at which Rider works in 'Pantaloons in Black.'⁴⁵

Mills were ubiquitous in rural Mississippi during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and are recorded in many media with their names often preserved as toponyms. I see no reason to think that Faulkner was influenced by these particular references.

Finally, Wolff sees a parallel between an inscription from the ledgers and the dedication in *Go Down, Moses*. According to her,

[t]he diary's title page reads:

Diary of Francis Terry Leak
1803–1864
Mississippi

[While] Faulkner's dedication page in *Go Down, Moses* reads:

To Mammy
Caroline Barr
Mississippi
[1840–1940]

The similarity of this dedication that commemorates the life of his 'mammy,' Callie Barr, to the title page of the Leak Diary may serve to show the connection of the two documents.⁴⁶

However, any connection between the passages is based on the observation that superficially they are similar. In her haste to produce yet further evidence for her thesis, Wolff forgot what she surely must have known at one time, namely that the inscription from the ledgers does not appear in the original manuscript versions that Faulkner purportedly studied. Instead it appeared only in the typescript volumes that were produced circa 1946–55, years after *Go Down, Moses* was published in 1942.⁴⁷ Consequently, Faulkner could never have seen the inscription in the 1930s because it did not exist at the time, so he certainly could not have been influenced by it.

The ledgers present an overview of mid-nineteenth century culture in north Mississippi and include references to commonplace activities

⁴⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 30–31.

⁴⁷ Both the manuscript and typescript versions of the ledgers can be viewed and compared online at http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/Leak,Franis_Terry.html#d1e85, accessed February 8, 2014.

on a rural plantation. In this capacity they refer to a wide range of cultural phenomena and list hundreds of personal names. Given this vast cornucopia of cultural information it is not surprising that there are numerous overlaps with Faulkner's work, which also covers a similar range of cultural phenomena and names. Behind the claim that Faulkner was heavily dependent upon the ledgers for inspiration is the implication that he was unable to see the same range of cultural phenomena all around him, in cultural landscapes, in newspapers, in local histories, in oral history, in cemeteries, and in general in his own life experience, and consequently resorted to effectively transcribing these elements from the ledgers. Similarly, as discussed below, Francisco's testimony suggests that Faulkner copied rather minor events and tales from McCarroll Place into his stories. The implication is that rather than an inspiration that provided "the philosophical and thematic power for some of his major works,"⁴⁸ McCarroll Place seemed to be little more than a mine for cultural trivia ... assuming that he ever visited there.

It is not self-evident that Faulkner borrowed from the ledgers; he could have found the same information almost anywhere. Indeed at one point Wolff appears to admit this when, as Kate Borger reports, she "said that without knowing Faulkner had read the journal, it would be very difficult to make the connection to his works."⁴⁹ On the other hand, Wolff noted elsewhere that given the apparent lack of corroboration for EWF3's testimony the ledgers would perhaps have to serve as corroboration.⁵⁰ It appears though that if the ledgers are to provide corroboration, they would not do so convincingly.

Castles in the Air

The problem of further ascertaining the veracity of an account such as Francisco's is complicated when so many of the related events fall outside the realm of documentation. For example, Faulkner's visits to Holly Springs are usually described without dates, making it impossible to establish that he might have actually been elsewhere at a particular

⁴⁸ Wolff quoted in Cohen, "Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered."

⁴⁹ Borger, "Wolff-King Finds Faulkner Link." This passage was called to my attention by Marcus Gray.

⁵⁰ Telephone conversation between Elliott and Wolff, July 4, 2013.

time. There are two notable exceptions. In the first EWF3 noted that “My earliest clear recollection of Faulkner is 1936 ... I couldn’t place any of [... my recollections] in specific time–place memory until the first grade in the fall of 1936. That’s when I recall listening to Dad and Will talking, especially about escapades when they were just a little older than I was.”⁵¹ However, in the fall of 1936 Faulkner was living and working as a screen writer in Hollywood, California, having left Oxford in July and returned in late August/early September 1937.⁵²

Also, Francisco states that after his parents were married in Montreat, North Carolina, on August 4, 1929, they “had a one day honeymoon at a hotel in Asheville and drove back to Holly Springs the next day.” When they arrived at McCarroll Place, “There sat Will, [on the gallery] with a beer in one hand and—as I recall Dad’s account of it—a dead rabbit and a couple of dead squirrels that he had shot in the other.”⁵³ On the face of it this story with all of its elaborate details raises questions: Why such a short honeymoon? If the couple was already in the Blue Ridge Mountains why would their honeymoon not last for several days or even weeks? How would Faulkner have been able to coordinate with the newlyweds, so that he could plan to kill several small animals and then meet them upon their arrival? Where were Edgar’s parents while Faulkner was sitting on the gallery? McCarroll Place was their home, so where were they while Faulkner was waiting with his beer and dead game? As it happens, upon investigation the story appears questionable. In August the bride-to-be Ruth Bitzer (1895–1992) was vacationing with her family and friends at the Bitzers’s cottage, “Heart’s Desire,” at Montreat when she and Edgar decided to marry. The newspaper refers to their marriage as a “surprise wedding,” occurring not on August 4, as EWF3 claimed, but on August 22. After the wedding the couple departed for the Vanderbilt Hotel in Asheville to spend their honeymoon and were to return “early in September” but the specific date apparently was not known.⁵⁴ By September 5, the couple had not returned, but it was reported that they would arrive sometime “this week.”⁵⁵ In other

⁵¹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 67.

⁵² Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, 941–69; Michel Gresset, *A Faulkner Chronology* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 47–49. Thanks to Marcus Gray for pointing out this contradiction.

⁵³ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 84–85.

⁵⁴ “Francisco-Bitzer Surprise Marriage,” *South Reporter*, August 29, 1929.

⁵⁵ “In Holly Springs and Its Vicinity Social-Personal,” *South Reporter*, September 5, 1929.

words, seemingly no one in Holly Springs knew their planned arrival date. While Faulkner's exact whereabouts cannot be established for early September, it seems very unlikely that he—not living in Holly Springs—would have known their planned arrival date. With so many questionable details, including wrong dates, the story begins to appear to be more of a confabulation than the truth. In this example and the one preceding, Francisco's stories demonstrate a tendency to fall apart under close examination.

Another example of this tendency is the story of the building of the family home McCarroll Place. The story recurs throughout his testimony and concerns the building of the home by John R. McCarroll in 1833, a narrative purportedly based upon a story that Edgar often told in the 1930s.⁵⁶ The importance of this story is that there is adequate material to demonstrate that the events never occurred. Furthermore, it can also be demonstrated that Edgar Francisco probably never even told a story like this.

I will first examine the standard historical narrative of McCarroll Place that has appeared in newspapers and pilgrimage brochures for decades since the 1930s. Presumably these accounts would reflect the story that Edgar had told. The earliest known version of this story appeared in 1932 in a brief, unsigned article in the newspaper the *South Reporter*. The pertinent part reads:

The old John R. McCarroll residence ... probably holds the record, in this city, ninety-two years, for the continuous residence of one family.

John R. McCarroll I., bought the lot in 1840 from "Byrd Hill and wife, Louise A. Hill," one acre, more or less for \$500. From the price it is presumed that Mr. McCarroll built the house. [i.e. the writer is assuming that there was no house on the property in 1840] ...⁵⁷

The following week's issue ("Shower for Mrs. Francisco, Jr.," September 12, 1929) tells that a shower was held for the bride on Tuesday, September 10, indicating that the couple returned between September 5 and 10. Ruth was the daughter of George Leese Bitzer (1860–1934) and his first wife Eliza "Lila" Alvis Penick Bitzer (1866–1899). Bitzer served as pastor of the Holly Springs Presbyterian Church from 1926 until his death in 1934.

⁵⁶ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 175–76.

⁵⁷ "Family in Same Residence for Ninety-two Years," *South Reporter*, December 15, 1932. The story was possibly written by Ruth Francisco, judging by the fact that only a few years later a lengthier version entitled "The McCarroll Place" appeared under her

The central event of the standard narrative was the 1840 purchase of the property by McCarroll from Byrd and Louisa Hill (the latter was the sister of McCarroll's wife Elizabeth), which effectively dated the beginning of the McCarroll family's residence. The 1840 date became a standard feature of the basic narrative that began to appear and reappear for years after, usually in promotional material associated with the Holly Springs Pilgrimage but also in other sources.⁵⁸

Despite the importance of the 1840 date to the McCarroll Place story, it is doubtful. The deed for the family's purchase of McCarroll Place was never recorded. Nevertheless, the data for the purchase appear to have come directly from a deed as suggested by the nature of the information and the legal phraseology employed: the names of the grantors, "Byrd Hill and wife, Louise A. Hill" (listed in quotes), year of sale, purchase price, and size of parcel "one acre, more or less." Although this information appears to come from a deed, it was not from the right deed. On November 10, 1840, J.R. McCarroll purchased from Byrd and Louisa Hill, a one-acre lot for \$500.⁵⁹ The primary data of this deed (i.e.

name in the WPA Source Material for Marshall County, Mississippi, pages 101–3. She had an interest in the old homes of Holly Springs and was a founder of the Holly Springs Pilgrimage in 1936. Robert Milton Winter, *Shadow of a Mighty Rock: A Social and Cultural History of Presbyterianism in Marshall County, Mississippi* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1997), 389.

⁵⁸ As noted, in the mid-1930s, Ruth Francisco wrote an article entitled "The McCarroll Place," a passage from which reads: "The McCarroll Place was built before Holly Springs took out her charter [May 12, 1837], by a cousin of the first John R. McCarroll, named Byrd Hill [the two were actually brothers-in-law having married sisters]. Bought in 1840 by John R. McCarroll, sheriff of Marshall County for thirty-two consecutive years, it is the only residence in the city owned and occupied continuously by five generations of one family" WPA source material for Marshall County, Mississippi, 1938, 101.

This text continues the notion that the property was purchased from Byrd Hill (1800–1872) in 1840. While the 1932 version extrapolated that the house was built in or after 1840, in this version it was extrapolated that the house was built by Hill prior to 1837, which is extremely unlikely considering that there is no evidence—as will be seen—that Hill ever owned the land. The theme that the family's ownership and occupancy of the site began in 1840 would continue for decades in pilgrimage promotional literature as evidenced by a blurb from 1974 which reads in part, "Six generations have occupied the home since 1840: John R. McCarroll, sheriff of Marshall County for 32 years, being the first" See also the collection of newspaper articles and brochures pertaining to the Holly Springs Pilgrimage ranging from 1936 through the 1970s. "Holly Springs Pilgrimage" file, Special Collections, Mississippi State University; also repeating the 1840 date was Helen Kerr Kempe, *The Pelican Guide to Old Homes of Mississippi*, vol. 2, *Columbus and the North*, 2nd ed. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1984), 91.

⁵⁹ Marshall County Deed Book H, page 565.

grantor and grantee, date, price, and size of parcel) correspond exactly to the transaction mentioned in the 1932 sketch. However, the parcel sold was Lot 302, not Lot 363, which is McCarroll Place's designation on the Holly Springs plat. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Byrd Hill ever owned Lot 363.⁶⁰

It is apparent that the story of Hill selling the McCarroll Place property to McCarroll in 1840 is the product of an error that probably arose from someone searching for the deed for McCarroll's acquisition of the property and mistaking the deed for the 1840 sale of Lot 302 for the desired deed, and subsequently incorporating the wrong information into the historical sketch. Consequently the standard narrative that appeared decade after decade was both spare and based on a fundamental error. By contrast Francisco's narrative was elaborate and pushed the origins of the house back to 1833, well before the founding of Holly Springs and well before the dates that had previously been used. His story is essentially as follows:

Between 1820 and 1830 John R. McCarroll came to the Chickasaw territory where he "met several Loves, members of a prominent Chickasaw family. One named Sam Love offered to help him build his log house" at "Sam's favorite spring" which was on the south side of what became McCarroll Place.⁶¹ Sam was described in some detail:

At first it appeared that the help would be limited to Love's companionship as he sat under a shade tree. In time, McCarroll came to realize that the help was in approval or blessing, and in what Sam taught him about the Chickasaws. Sam was baffled by the white man's belief that Chickasaw treaties ceded ownership. Since the Chickasaw did not own the land, what they ceded was use and responsibility. He would point to the spring and note the water bubbling up, flowing a distance, and disappearing into the sand. He would say that the spirit

⁶⁰ As late as December 1839, Lot 363 and the adjacent Lot 362, land that constituted the bulk of what became the McCarroll Place property, were sold by Claiborne Kyle and Beverly G. Mitchell to Jesse Lewellen and James C. Alderson for \$360. Kyle and Mitchell were owners of considerable Holly Springs real estate acquired from John B. and Delilah Love Moore. Delilah had received the entire section on which Holly Springs was located as part of her land allotment from the federal government, she being a member of the Chickasaw tribe. See Marshall County Deed Book G, pages 477–78; Deed Book N, pages 692–96. This evidence provides a complete title for the lot from its original grant as an Indian allotment through its sale in December 1839. McCarroll presumably acquired Lot 363 at an unknown date after this period, although as noted, the deed was not recorded.

⁶¹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 13, 66, 175, cf. 80, 125, 130, 169.

lifts up the water and then turns it loose. So it is foolish for us to imagine we own that which belongs to the spirit. Sam said that if man attempts to control the waters, the waters will control man.⁶²

In 1834 upon the birth of his daughter Mary a fourth room was added to the house,⁶³ and in 1836 McCarroll rolled the house northwards uphill about 200 yards to its current site on Van Dorn Avenue and built two rooms onto the northern side of the house.⁶⁴ The lot on which it was placed had been purchased by Byrd Hill in 1836 immediately after the survey of the Holly Springs plat. In 1840 McCarroll purchased the lot from Hill.⁶⁵

This at any rate was the way that EWF3 told the story of the building of McCarroll Place, a story that can be questioned for a number of reasons. First, the elaborateness of the account raises questions that are further exacerbated by the lack of documentation. Even with relatively good documentation, dating the construction and modification of historic houses is usually problematic and generally provides only estimated dates. Yet Francisco dates every phase of the house's construction with great specificity and without one shred of evidence other than to claim that the story came from his father. Furthermore, much of the account does not seem realistic. For example, building a house in a low area near a spring is contrary to my observation that houses tended to be built on high, well-drained areas that were as open to breezes as possible. Furthermore moving the house uphill would have entailed a tremendous cost and effort during a period when the settlers had little time for such matters as they were establishing themselves in a new territory.

Another unrealistic element is the story of Sam Love, who is characterized as being in tune with the environment and ready to offer his nature-wisdom to John McCarroll. While EWF3 was correct in saying that there were several Loves in the area who constituted a "prominent Chickasaw family," they were not traditional Chickasaws so to speak; the Loves were members of a prominent mixed-blood family, the children and grandchildren of Thomas Love (ca. 1745–1832). They along with other mixed-bloods had come to dominate the tribe politically and economi-

⁶² Ibid., 175–76.

⁶³ Ibid., 124, 169.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 66, 125, 130, 175.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 124–25.

cally. While Francisco's Sam Love could not understand the concept of land ownership, in reality the Loves thoroughly understood the concept of land ownership and the value of money. Among the Loves in Marshall County during the 1830s and early 1840s were Benjamin, Henry, and Isaac Love, who owned hundreds of acres and numerous slaves. Their sister, Delilah Love Moore, wife of John B. Moore, acquired 2,250 acres of land from the 1832 Treaty of Pontotoc Creek that included Section 6 Township 4 Range 2 East, on which the town of Holly Springs was founded in 1836. Finally, Sam Love was born on August 3, 1823, making him only ten years old when he purportedly assisted in building McCarroll Place. His age alone would call his role in this tale into question.⁶⁶

There is no reason to believe John McCarroll ever lived in Holly Springs prior to about 1837. Indications are that he and his brother James A. McCarroll moved from North Carolina to Madison County, Tennessee, in the 1820s, and there John resided until moving to Marshall County around 1837, when his name first appeared in the county tax rolls.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Hubert H. McAlexander, "The Saga of a Mixed-Blood Chickasaw Dynasty," *Journal of Mississippi History* 49 (1987): 288–89; Marshall County Tax Rolls 1836–1843, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://marshallcountymms.org/court/courtindex.php>. Samuel Love (August 3, 1823–September 10, 1893, buried near Mead, Bryan County, Oklahoma) was a son of Thomas Love and his second wife, Homahota. Marie King Garland, *The Chickasaw Loves and Allied Families* (Ardmore, OK: Ardmore Photocopy Co., 1970), 169–70.

There is a similarity between Sam Love and Faulkner's character Sam Fathers, whose father was a Chickasaw chief and whose mother was a black slave. Sam Fathers was depicted as a wise older man who spurned civilization to live at Major de Spain's hunting camp. In *Go Down, Moses* he taught the young Ike McCaslin the ways of nature, learning to live with nature and not trying to dominate it. This story sounds very similar to Sam Love teaching the not-quite-so-young John McCarroll the way of nature. They also have the same first name. One suspects that as discussed elsewhere herewith that Francisco incorporated Faulkner's motifs into his narrative to provide further evidence of how his family influenced the writer's development. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: Random House, 1942), 163–331.

⁶⁷ John Ramsey McCarroll was born ca. 1803 in North Carolina, probably in Chatham County, the son of Thomas McCarroll and Sarah "Sallie" Ramsey McCarroll. See unsigned, undated typescript, "John, Matthew & Ambrose Ramsey," accessed November 19, 2013, www.kithandkinofthesouth.org/uploads/2/6/2/1/2621480/ramsey.pdf.

After the Jackson Purchase cession of western Kentucky and Tennessee in 1818, John and James moved to Madison County, Tennessee, in the 1820s. James A. McCarroll's name appears as early as December 1823, with subsequent references in 1825. Madison County Clerk's Office Minute Book 1, pages 252, 515–518. Copy on microfilm in the Tennessee Room, Jackson-Madison County Library, Jackson, Tennessee. John R. McCarroll's name is listed on several occasions in Madison County. On November 6, 1826,

It is also claimed that McCarroll built the house's first addition in 1834 when his daughter Mary was born, yet the censuses indicate that she was born in Tennessee and not Mississippi, further indicating McCarroll and family were not in Mississippi at the time.⁶⁸

While the earliest parts of the story were apparently fabricated from new material, the latter part assimilates the spurious 1840 purchase of McCarroll Place as if to link the tale into the standard narrative of the house's history. In the context of Francisco's narrative, the purchase

he was appointed as the administrator of an estate; on June 17, 1830, he was married to Elizabeth C. Eddins at the same ceremony in which Byrd Hill married Elizabeth's sister Louisa Eddins; and on November 7, 1831, John was appointed as guardian of two Tyson children. Jonathan K.T. Smith, *A Genealogical Miscellany III. Madison County, Tennessee*, (1996), 6, 13, 24, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.tngenweb.org/records/madison/misc/gmmc/gmmc3-10.htm#three>; Jonathan K.T. Smith, *A Genealogical Miscellany III. Madison County, Tennessee*, (1996), 6, 13, 24, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.tngenweb.org/records/madison/misc/gmmc/gmmc3-11.htm>.

On March 9, 1833, as secretary of Union Lodge #69, McCarroll published an announcement in the *Southern Statesman* newspaper, Jackson, Tennessee, for a funeral service to be held for a freemason, the Reverend Elijah Cross, who had married John and Elizabeth McCarroll three years earlier. "Descendants of Elijah Cross—of Carroll and Hardeman Counties in Tennessee," accessed November 19, 2013, <http://crossfamilyancestry.org/SectionL.pdf>. On July 27, 1833, the *Southern Statesman* published a list of letters remaining in the post office in Covington, Tennessee, which included the name John McCarroll. "Abstracts from the *Southern Statesman*, 1833," accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.tngenweb.org/records/madison/misc/newspapers/s-states2.htm>. On September 14, 1833, McCarroll purchased fifty acres in Madison County, Tennessee, see Madison County Deed Book 3, page 494. This purchase suggests that McCarroll was not considering moving at the time. The first tax roll of Marshall County, Mississippi, dates to 1836, but John McCarroll's name is not listed. The following year, though, his name does appear, and it continues to appear in subsequent tax rolls and in the 1840 census. McCarroll's first recorded land transaction in the county dates to July 17, 1838, when he purchased the N ½ Section 21, Township 4, Range 2 West, 320 acres of rural property. This purchase suggests that upon initially moving to Marshall County, McCarroll and his family may well have lived outside Holly Springs prior to moving into town, see, Marshall County Deed Book E, page 318.

I called Sally Wolff's attention to the discrepancy between Francisco's placing McCarroll in the Holly Springs area at a time when documentary evidence places him about a hundred miles away in Madison County, Tennessee. She asked Francisco about this, and he replied by modifying his story, claiming that McCarroll did indeed reside in Madison County while traveling on hunting trips to Holly Springs. While not impossible, such hunting trips for that time and place are in my experience unprecedented while bearing the appearance of being awkwardly contrived to make believable a story that seems altogether unbelievable. Email correspondence, Elliott to Wolff, July 12, 2013, Wolff presented Francisco's modified story to me in a telephone call on September 14, 2013.

⁶⁸ According to the 1850 and 1860 US censuses for Marshall County, Mississippi, Mary McCarroll was born in Tennessee.

appears somewhat odd, stating as it does that McCarroll built his home seven years before he purchased it. The primary significance of the 1840 event is that it demonstrates Francisco's anachronistic suturing of a historical error that originated in 1932 into what he claims to be a family story passed down by word of mouth from the 1830s.

If Edgar Francisco Jr. had told this story so often, why did it not appear in the standard narrative that was used to promote McCarroll Place for the pilgrimage? Such histories usually try to festoon old homes with as much antiquity and glamour as possible, often with little documentation. Being able to claim that the house was built in 1833 by McCarroll and his Indian friend years before the founding of Holly Springs would certainly have been more appealing than claiming that McCarroll had simply purchased it in 1840. The absence from the standard narrative of Francisco's elaborations suggest that his story was not available when the narrative was composed. This issue also calls into question Francisco's chief "source," the testimony of his father. If this was questionable or even nonexistent, the younger Francisco's testimony is further called into question.

The analysis suggests there is little reason to believe Francisco's story about the origins of McCarroll Place. It appears to be a fabrication in which a few facts, or what were believed to be facts (e.g. the 1840 purchase), provided a framework around which imaginary additions were added, all of which were presented as a story received by oral transmission through his father. The construction of the story seems to exemplify a general process at work behind EWF3's testimony in which he builds elaborate stories around a few basic facts or dates. Further evidence of this will emerge.

Ludie-in-the-Window and Other Stories

A recurring theme in Francisco's narrative is that William Faulkner was heavily influenced by his visits to Holly Springs and McCarroll Place and integrated much that he saw into his stories. As previously noted, "his first short stories were about McCarroll Place."⁶⁹ Here Francisco was apparently referring to three short stories: "Ambuscade," "Raid,"

⁶⁹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 77.

and “Retreat,”⁷⁰ which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1934⁷¹ and were later incorporated into the novel *The Unvanquished* that was published in 1938. Two of the incidents from McCarroll Place that were purportedly incorporated into Faulkner’s stories can be dealt with fairly quickly. One was the story of EWF3 as a child having his mouth washed out with soap for cursing.⁷² This story was purportedly the basis of references to “get the soap,” to wash out the mouth of young Bayard Sartoris. Based upon recollections from my childhood and youth, threats to wash someone’s mouth out with soap were quite common, although I never knew anyone who actually experienced it. The claim that Faulkner was basing his writing on an incident that supposedly happened at McCarroll Place seems strange when the image was so commonplace. It is somewhat like having a horse with spots and claiming that Faulkner based his story “Spotted Horses” on it.

The other incident from McCarroll Place is a story about the family’s silver, supposedly buried during the Civil War and perhaps recovered, perhaps still buried.⁷³ Stories of hidden gold, silver, and jewelry have been ubiquitous in Mississippi and other areas where they spawned efforts to find buried treasure that probably never existed in the first place. Why would Faulkner need to copy the specific McCarroll Place story when the image is so commonplace? As with the soap story, claiming that Faulkner was dependent upon a particular experience in a particular place for his possession of such widely diffused imagery is less than compelling. To claim that these stories were “about McCarroll Place,” meaning that the home played a central role in the story, is at minimum hyperbolic.

A more elaborate and sustained claim for the Francisco family’s influence on Faulkner centers on the name “Ludie” etched into a windowpane at McCarroll Place, the name being the nickname of a relative, Mary Louisa Baugh.⁷⁴ According to Francisco, the etching became the basis for Faulkner’s creation of an image that was first used in the short story “Ambuscade.” The key text is short and reads “one day General

⁷⁰ Ibid, 50, 70–74, 84.

⁷¹ Gresset, *A Faulkner Chronology*, 43.

⁷² Wolff, *Ledgers*, 69–74.

⁷³ Ibid., 57, 73–74, 101–2, 138.

⁷⁴ Mary Louisa Baugh (1845–1869) was the daughter of Richard D. Baugh (1814–1893) and Emily Eddins Baugh (1820–1845). Two of Emily’s sisters married John R. McCarroll and Byrd Hill.

Forrest rode down South Street [now known as South Lamar Street] in Oxford where there watched him through a windowpane a young girl who scratched her name on it with a diamond ring: Celia Cook.”⁷⁵

Prior to the appearance of Francisco’s claim, the origin of the name etched in glass was fairly certain. While there is indeed a name etched in glass at McCarroll Place,⁷⁶ there is also one in Oxford that had long been considered the model—and with good reason. This etching and its background were described almost half a century ago by E.O. Hawkins Jr. in a short, compelling article,⁷⁷ in which he demonstrated the connection between the Oxford etching and Faulkner’s image. The etching was apparently made by Jane Taylor Cook (1847–1882), who as a teenager scratched her name into the window of her home on South Lamar Street in Oxford during the Civil War. After the war Jane married William Montgomery Forrest, son of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

The house on South Lamar burned in 1935. A fragment of the glass pane with the name was salvaged and donated to the Mary Buie Museum (now part of the University of Mississippi Museum), where a variant of the story was incorporated into a label for the artifact. The relevant portion reads:

When the 7th Tennessee [Cavalry] retreated through Oxford in '63 [sic, actually December 1862] Jane Taylor Cook, who then lived in this home, watched through this glass. She carved her name with a diamond ring she wore, then went out in the street and “cursed the men out” for running from the Yankees. She later became the bride of General Forrest’s son, Captain William Montgomery Forrest, who was with the 7th Tennessee Troops when they came through Oxford, and saw Jane Taylor Cook at that time, admiring her loyalty came back later to

⁷⁵ William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Random House, 1938), 17.

⁷⁶ The window pane has apparently been removed from McCarroll Place. There is a similar pane on display in the Marshall County Museum that was interpreted as being the original in the Holly Springs newspaper, *South Reporter*. Lois Swaney Shipp, “Museuming: New Window Installed at Museum,” *South Reporter*, May 19, 2011, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.southreporter.com/2011/wk20/society.html>.

However, I was informed at the museum that the pane on display is one of two copies, the other being located at McCarroll Place, while the original pane, presumably because of its newfound notoriety, was placed in a vault at an undisclosed location.

⁷⁷ E.O. Hawkins Jr., “Jane Cook and Cecilia Farmer,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 18 (1965): 248–51.

claim her as his bride.⁷⁸

Hawkins pointed out that some of the story's details were inaccurate—Forrest was not in command during the retreat through Oxford, and his son W.M. Forrest apparently was not there either, although Jane Cook did in fact later marry him—but the historicity of the details is not of importance. Taken as a whole the story is clearly the prototype of the sentence: both involve a young girl named Cook, both are set on South Lamar in Oxford, both involve the passing of Confederate cavalry, and both are connected to General Forrest.⁷⁹

A discovery has recently been made that provides even greater credence to the story. Heretofore Jane Cook's home has only been identified as being on South Lamar Street. However, an investigation into its location has revealed that this was the same house that was occupied by the Murry C. Falkner family (William Faulkner's family) from 1906 through 1912. In other words, as a youth William Faulkner resided for a half dozen years in the very house where the etching was located, and he was exposed to it on a daily basis. This fact would make it almost certain that he was aware of and adapted this image.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Quoted in Hawkins, "Jane Cook and Cecelia Farmer," 249–50. The sentence construction is rendered accurately.

⁷⁹ The story of the name etched in glass evolved in two subsequent publications. The second version appeared in *Intruder in the Dust*, where the young girl—this time unnamed—was the daughter of the jailer whose family resided in the jail—not in Oxford but in Jefferson—where "scratched into one of the panes of the fanlight [actually "sidelight." Faulkner apparently had his terminology wrong.] beside the door was a young girl's single name, written by her own hand into the glass with a diamond ... who stood at that window that afternoon and watched the battered remnant of a Confederate brigade retreat through the town, meeting suddenly across that space the eyes of the ragged unshaven lieutenant who led one of the broken companies ... she didn't know his name then, let alone that six months later he would be her husband." See, William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (New York: Random House, 1948), 50–51. Although the setting was changed, there are still unmistakable elements borrowed from *The Unvanquished* and from the Oxford lore: the young girl, her name etched in glass as she watched the retreat of Confederate cavalry, one of whom would become her husband. The final variation of the story appears in its most lengthy form in "The Jail" section of *Requiem for a Nun*. Here the young girl is again the daughter of the jailer—this time with a name, Cecelia Farmer, reminiscent of Celia Cook. See William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951), 229–62.

⁸⁰ The identification of the house was based on the following evidence: the house was on South Lamar and was occupied and presumably owned by the family of Jane Taylor Cook, whose father was James M. Cook. In the early 1930s, the same house became the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Tate Jr. as indicated by information in the Hawkins article. The only real estate owned by James M. Cook that fronted on South Lamar was Lot 3, which

Jane Taylor Cook's name etched in glass seems then to be without question the prototype on which Faulkner based his three literary images. Yet EWF3 claims that Faulkner's use of the name etched in glass came not from the image in the very house where Faulkner had lived but from McCarroll Place and the name Ludie. According to EWF3, Faulkner "would say, 'Edgar, tell me some more about Ludie.' He was referring to the windowpane with 'Ludie' on it. Dad was quite willing to tell the story."⁸¹ Faulkner was seemingly obsessed with the story: "He would walk in and go straight to the window. Not even a nod or 'hello.' He would stare at the window and then through it and say, 'Ludie is still there' ... Then he sat down and talked about Ludie."⁸²

As related by Francisco the story provided the background to Ludie's etching in the usual quasi-omniscient discourse filled with an abundance of questionable detail:

In 1860, at the age of sixteen, Ludie moved to Holly Springs to live with her aunt Elizabeth and uncle John [McCarroll]. She lived here from the beginning of the war until the war was over.

The town absolutely fell in love with her. She was frail but beautiful. She was the daughter of the mayor of Memphis. She was lovely and fragile. It was a heroine-type story....

he owned from 1857 through 1876. See, Lafayette County Deed Book H, page 673; Book U, page 239. By the twentieth century, Lot 3 had been subdivided into a north half and a south half, with the Cumberland Presbyterian manse on the south half. This house still survives. In 1925–26 the north half came into the possession of W.W. East, whose daughter Katie Belle had married Henry L. Tate Jr. See Lafayette County Deed Book 91, page 319; Deed Book 97, page 35. Although the Tates never owned this parcel, they did reside there as indicated by the 1930 census, which lists their street address as 603 South Lamar, which is to say the north half of Lot 3. Having established that the Cook–Tate house was on the northern half of Lot 3, I then noticed that the same home was owned by the M.C. Falkners in 1906–12. See Lafayette County Deed Book XX, page 42; Deed Book 1, pages 295, 387. Also see Jane Isbell Haynes, *William Faulkner: His Lafayette County Heritage* (Ripley, MS: Tippah County Historical and Genealogical Society, 1992), 21–22; Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History*, 152; the Falkners' residence at this location was mentioned by: John Faulkner, *My Brother Bill*, 35, 37–38, 85–87; Murry C. Falkner, *The Falkners of Mississippi: A Memoir*, 31; John B. Cullen and Floyd C. Watkins, *Old Times in the Faulkner Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 3. The house burned on January 13, 1935, while leaving enough of the structure intact for the window to survive. *Oxford Eagle*, January 17, 1935. Following the fire, a fragment of the pane with the etched name was salvaged and eventually donated to the Mary Buie Museum. Hawkins, "Jane Cook and Cecelia Farmer," 249.

⁸¹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 80.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 132.

During the war, the town changed control six times, I understand ... so it was probably before the first Union occupation that she etched her name, and I imagine it was soon after she arrived. She was watching the troop movements. She was standing in the sitting room looking east, out the open gallery and watching the troops move back and forth on the road to the depot. This road was later named Van Dorn Avenue for the Confederate general. She inscribed her name on the window, and the pane of glass is still there.

Ludie was out in the yard on occasion with Dad's grandmother when the troops went by, and the two women passed out little pecan pies that they had made. They were counting groups of soldiers going through, and they made marks on the house with lumps of coal. The coal marks were there until the house was painted.

Dad told me that his grandmother thought the Confederate soldier Ludie married was one of the soldiers they had talked with while handing out the pies. In any case, six months after meeting a soldier in Holly Springs, Ludie married him, and immediately after the war, they left.⁸³

Here are all the elements—the young girl, the name etched in the glass pane, the Confederate troops passing by, one of whom would later become her husband. It appears that many of the details were invented so that Ludie could serve as an alternate prototype for Faulkner's name etched in glass, when there is already a prototype that is virtually beyond dispute. Francisco described Faulkner's transformation of Ludie

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 82. The level of detail suggests that much of the story was fabricated although most of it cannot be falsified. However, EWF3 did make a statement about Ludie that can be falsified, "In 1869, the town received word that she had died. No one knew where she had gone, or where she was buried. No one could get in touch with anyone who knew." *Ledgers*, 83. While he claims that Ludie virtually vanished, this story is not true. An obituary indicates that she died in Memphis at the home of her father R.D. Booth at 7:15 p.m. on January 11, 1869, and that her body was transferred to Holly Springs for burial. See *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 12, 1869. Furthermore on January 15 in Holly Springs, someone with initials M.A.W. wrote a memorial for Ludie. See, "In Memoriam," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 24, 1869. There seems then to have been little mystery about her death except that which was invented. In another passage Francisco used her supposed disappearance for dramatic effect contrasting her absence with the continuing presence of her name: "Ludie was gone, vanished, her whereabouts unknown, so only the etching remained. She managed to leave that evidence of her having existed for Will Faulkner to stare at seventy years later and say 'She is still here.'" Wolff, *Ledgers*, 55.

into the passage in *The Unvanquished*: “Ludie was called ‘Celia Cook.’ Will accurately described her as a young woman looking out at soldiers marching. He changed what would be Van Dorn Avenue in Holly Springs to South Street in Oxford, and he changed Van Dorn’s troops ... to General Forrest.”⁸⁴ He is thereby claiming that Faulkner changed the details in the Ludie story so they almost exactly matched the details from the Jane Cook story. The intent behind this is transparent.

He also tells us that “I think the story appeared in one of the same short stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*, ‘Ambuscade’ Apparently he had told Dad about this in 1934 and retold it to me when I was old enough to remember.”⁸⁵ In telling this story Francisco does not seem to realize that while “Ambuscade” did appear in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1934, that version did not include the name etched in glass line that would not appear until 1938 when the novel *The Unvanquished* was published. It is impossible that Faulkner told Edgar Francisco about the publication of a story motif that did not yet exist. If Francisco had in fact remembered when the motif was first published, he would have recalled the 1938 publication of the novel. To claim that he recalled its appearing years earlier when “Ambuscade” was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* is clearly an invention based on inadequate research into the publishing history of the line in question.

Also Francisco claimed that Faulkner liked to see the name Ludie in reverse:

He was fascinated by it. He would say to my father, “I always see her name in reverse, Edgar” ... Will would sit in the rocking chair in the sunroom, but he was looking at the window pane in reverse—from the outside, looking in. He talked about how the etching represented changelessness and eternity and continuity.⁸⁶

There is a clear connection between this description and a passage from *Intruder in the Dust* where Faulkner wrote: “he would go up onto the gallery to look at it [the name-etched glass], it cryptic now in

⁸⁴ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 84.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 84. Also, William Faulkner, “Ambuscade,” first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* (September 29, 1934), 12–13, 80, 81; this version of the story was different than the version that appeared in the 1938 novel *The Unvanquished*. The original version was reprinted in Joseph Blotner, ed., *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner*, (New York: Random House, 1979), 3–16, cf. 681–82.

⁸⁶ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 82, cf. 133.

reverse, not for a sense of the past but to realise again the eternality, the deathlessness and changelessness of youth.”⁸⁷ Both describe viewing the etching in “reverse” and ascribe to it a sense of “eternity” and “changelessness.” Francisco seemingly intended to convey the idea that Faulkner’s experience and thoughts at McCarroll Place in the 1930s were resurrected a decade later in a single line from *Intruder in the Dust*. This was accomplished through taking Faulkner’s words from 1948 and incorporating them into a “memory” from the 1930s.

Similarly, we recall the description of Ludie: “She was frail but beautiful ... lovely and fragile.”⁸⁸ In *Requiem for a Nun* the girl who etched her name in the window is described as “frail” and “fragile.”⁸⁹ In another example of probable borrowing, there is the statement that “Will would say: ‘Edgar, I feel as if she is standing in the middle of the room. Edgar, she’s right here. The past doesn’t die, Edgar. It’s right here. Ludie is right here.’”⁹⁰ Compare this with Faulkner’s famous line: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁹¹ The similarities between Francisco’s testimony and Faulkner’s wording suggest either that the former recalled Faulkner’s exact words from the 1930s, words that he would not even use for years, or that he did background reading on the name-etched glass image, picked up on Faulkner’s phraseology, and incorporated it into his “reminiscences.” The latter seems more plausible, especially given Francisco’s tendency to anachronistically incorporate later material into memories of earlier times.

There is another question. Faulkner was known to have given autographed copies of his books to friends. If Edgar Francisco was such a close friend, and if Faulkner’s experience at McCarroll Place was so seminal in terms of developing ideas for his work, why would there not be copies of autographed books in the Franciscos’ possession? Yet along with the other lack of corroboration, there are apparently no autographed volumes; at least none have been brought forward as evidence of a Faulkner–Francisco connection.

As demonstrated in the previous section on the building of the McCarroll house, there is a definite tendency for EWF3 to tell stories that

⁸⁷ Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, 50.

⁸⁸ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 82.

⁸⁹ Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 229, 232, 236, 257.

⁹⁰ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 83.

⁹¹ Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 92.

draw in part on a few facts—or what are perceived as facts—that are then substantially embellished with imaginative constructions. In this section we see a similar pattern of story construction but with an added emphasis on demonstrating a connection between Faulkner and McCarroll Place. In this regard elements such as the Ludie window, the McCarroll-buried silver, and the soap incident are used as the focus for stories about Faulkner's translating his experience at McCarroll Place into incidents in his Yoknapatawpha fiction. While the stories are overall not convincing they also exhibit contradictions that further undercut their credibility. In regard to the Ludie window, Francisco appears to have engaged in background reading in the works that pertain to the girl-in-the-window motif and incorporating Faulkner's words retroactively into memories from the 1930s.

A Tale Told with Fear and Anguish

Throughout the Francisco transcripts one question keeps nagging: if there had been such a long friendship between Faulkner and Edgar Francisco Jr., why was it virtually unknown until a few years ago? The growing fascination with one of the most renowned authors of modern times would have certainly been an incentive for someone to at least talk about this. Yet to my knowledge no one ever spoke of it prior to Francisco.

In his testimony Francisco seems to be obsessed with providing explanations for why no one seems to recall the Faulkner connection. These explanations often appear contrived and even bizarre. The purported ignorance about Faulkner's visits is in part explained by the claim that hardly anyone in Holly Springs knew him.⁹² This seems difficult to believe given the decades of visits to a small town where a continuing presence is not likely to go unnoticed. Furthermore, while Faulkner's visits to Holly Springs are central, nothing is said about Edgar Francisco visiting Oxford. If the two men were so close would Edgar have not reciprocated with visits to Faulkner? Was there an underlying rationale for not having Edgar visit Oxford? Silence on this matter would certainly reduce the need to tell stories about Oxford and the need to explain why no one in Oxford remembered Edgar Francisco.

Beyond these issues, there is also the need to explain why members

⁹² Wolff, *Ledgers*, 90.

of the Francisco family themselves had never spoken of this friendship before EWF3 broke the silence in 2008. The explanations for the silence are couched in terms of angst and outrage associated with Faulkner, and how these feelings effectively muffled the family so that despite Faulkner's growing celebrity they would not or could not bring themselves to speak of their old friend.

For example, Ruth Francisco, who lived until 1992, apparently never spoke of the Faulkner connection. According to EWF3 his mother detested the writer because of his cursing and beer drinking. "There was great animosity between Mother and Will."⁹³ Faulkner's visits to the Francisco home were times of tension between Ruth and the writer: "Probably every time that he came over, she became agitated about it and upset and was unhappy about it. So eventually they [Faulkner and Edgar] just stopped seeing each other."⁹⁴ In later years "She asked Dad never to tell that Faulkner came to our house. She said, 'That goes for you, too, Eddie [EWF3],' ... she never would—she just never would say that she knew him. Mother never admitted that she knew him. That is so sad."⁹⁵ So the decades of silence were attributed to the pent-up rage of his mother.

The silence on the part of EWF3 is also attributed to trauma or anguish associated with Faulkner's visits and the ledgers from which he noted the writer frequently reading and taking notes. However, rather than a dispassionate reading, Faulkner would purportedly "curse and yell at the diarist ... scribbling with fury all the while."⁹⁶ He was "agitated and angry, and talked to the writer of the diary ... talked angrily to him. He was in conversation with Leak."⁹⁷ The claim that Faulkner would "curse and yell" at Leak was ostensibly because of references to slavery; Leak was a slave owner.⁹⁸ However, the claims of emotional outbursts do not seem realistic from someone investigating a historical document. They appear more like histrionics in a bad melodrama. To read the Leak diaries is to read the dispassionate day-to-day business operation of a progressive planter who was certainly no Simon Legree. There is nothing sensationalistic in them, so it is difficult to imagine

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 73, cf. 12, 89–90, 93.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

anyone reacting in the manner described by Francisco—especially after more than a decade of constantly poring over the ledgers.

Regardless, Faulkner's purported reactions were the beginning of Francisco's trauma that was seemingly triggered by the writer's strange reaction to the ledgers, a trauma that drove Francisco into silence over the whole affair for decades. As he told the writer for the *New York Times*, "There were long-repressed things that Faulkner uncovered that I didn't know were in the family I just bottled all that up and forgot about it."⁹⁹

In the transcripts he discusses this response in more detail:

I had watched Faulkner for two years as he got very angry reading some old farm journals and cursing the writer. I had come to dislike the diarist as much as Faulkner did. I had only the vaguest idea of what was upsetting my fascinating friend, but I was ready to punch out the diarist. Then suddenly I realized that this man I had learned to hate was family, not past history, but my family now I thought that Faulkner, the most fascinating man I knew, had learned something so bad that he probably would never speak to me again. I fled to my room and would not come out

I vowed never to touch those old diaries and never to talk about or think about any of that again. My nine-year-old self could not cope with the overwhelming sense of loss, the loss of approval from this person so important to me. The problem was not what made Faulkner angry, an issue about which I had only the vaguest understanding at age nine, but as an adult assumed that was the problem. But it was the fear of abandonment by this person so important to me that I bottled up and totally repressed it for seventy years. When memory of the vow and the anguish of the fear I felt so long finally popped back into conscious memory, I was astonished that the anguish I felt was just as fresh and overwhelming as when that feeling of abandonment was bottled up and hidden away¹⁰⁰

These passages are filled with "anguish" and "fear of abandonment." Francisco also spoke of "anxiety attacks," of an "angry confrontation with Leak," and of "the trauma it has caused me and the difficulty I have talking about it."¹⁰¹ He extends these claims to include his reading

⁹⁹ EWF3, quoted in Cohen, "Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered."

¹⁰⁰ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 177–78.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

Faulkner's works, specifically *Go Down, Moses*, stating that "I tried to read that book years ago, but I got so angry I threw it across the room, and it stayed there for months."¹⁰² The level of emotional torment is suggestive of someone who has endured a childhood horror of great magnitude. It is difficult to believe that such a reaction could result from listening to someone ranting about a nineteenth-century text, a rant that is unbelievable in itself. This idea seems as incredible as the story of his mother refusing to mention Faulkner's name decades after his death. Both are explanations for why the Franciscos had never mentioned their relationship to Faulkner, both are filled with a sense of angst, and both appear to be fabrications probably designed, however awkwardly, to explain why the Faulkner revelation was so late in surfacing.

Regarding his mother's silence on the matter of Faulkner, Francisco makes a further claim:

Apparently people came around after Will died. They came to Holly Springs and said that they heard that Will had been there. They wanted to look at the etching of Ludie and asked whether Mother knew if Ludie was Will's inspiration for several etchings on windows. Mother was perfectly happy to show them the etching and tell them the story of Ludie, but when it came to "Did Faulkner use it?" she had no idea, she would say—she didn't know. So she never would—she just never would say that she knew him. Mother never admitted that she knew him.¹⁰³

The implication is that there were several people who had not only heard of Faulkner's association with McCarroll Place but who were making a connection between the Ludie window and Faulkner's use of the name etched in glass. This appears to reflect in part a story that was told as part of the pilgrimage tour of McCarroll Place that suggested that Faulkner had seen and been influenced by the etching. In this regard Oxford attorney and Holly Springs native Frank Hurdle recalled that during the early to mid 1970s when he served as a tour guide at McCarroll Place, "The glass etched with Ludie Baugh's name was pointed out to us and it was stated then that Faulkner was a friend of the Franciscos and that he later incorporated the etched glass detail into one or more literary works."¹⁰⁴ Stories associated with house tours are notoriously

¹⁰² EWF3, quoted in Cohen, "Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered."

¹⁰³ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 117.

¹⁰⁴ Frank Hurdle, "Hurdle on Faulkner: The Holly Springs Connection," *Hotty Toddy*,

unreliable, being usually based as much on speculation and hearsay as fact. The story in question likely began as a speculation about a connection between Faulkner and the Ludie etching, although we have seen that such etchings were fairly common during the nineteenth century and that there had been one in Faulkner's childhood home.¹⁰⁵ With time the speculation developed into a story to be told during pilgrimage that would bring notoriety to McCarroll Place.

The story was investigated by Jane Isbell Haynes,¹⁰⁶ who visited McCarroll Place on March 12, 1985, after being invited by Ruth Francisco's niece, Sarah Doxey Tate (later Sarah Doxey Greer, 1933–2013) to see the Ludie window. Haynes interviewed Ruth Francisco along with Ruth's sister, Mary Bitzer Doxey (1906–2002), and Mary's daughter, Sarah. If there had been a Faulkner connection, these women would have known about it. However, none had any knowledge of his having actually been there, let alone having been a regular visitor. In the end Haynes produced an article which presented evidence that Faulkner had been to Holly Springs—not surprising given its proximity to Oxford—but found no evidence that he had ever been to McCarroll Place. In lieu of such evidence she suggested that he had perhaps seen the Ludie window while touring McCarroll Place during the Holly Springs Pilgrimage when he “had ample opportunity to see this window and to hear the oft-told story of Ludie.”¹⁰⁷ Of course as we have already seen, the hypothesis that Faulkner used the Ludie etching is superfluous

April 28, 2014, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://hottytoddy.com/2014/04/29/hurdle-on-faulkner-the-holly-springs-connection/>.

¹⁰⁵ I recall here the aforementioned Jane Taylor Cook etching. Furthermore there is also a fragment of windowpane with the etching of the name Jennie Garland in the University of Mississippi Museums, a photograph of which appears in George G. Stewart, *Yoknapatawpha: Images and Voices* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 39. On the same page Stewart remarks that “The existence of three known examples from in and near Lafayette County suggests that this practice may have been a fashion for young, engaged women, particularly during the Civil War era.” In an endnote on page 89 the three are identified as Jane Cook, Jennie Garland, and Ludie Baugh.

¹⁰⁶ Haynes would eventually publish two books that related Faulkner to his background in Ripley and Oxford: *William Faulkner: His Tippah County Heritage: Lands, Houses, and Businesses*, Ripley, Mississippi (Columbia SC: The Seajay Press, 1985) and the previously cited *William Faulkner: His Lafayette County Heritage: Lands, Houses, and Businesses*.

¹⁰⁷ Jane Isbell Haynes, “Another Source for Faulkner's Inscribed Window Panes,” *Mississippi Quarterly* 39 (1986), 365–367. Francisco states that he was shown this article some years ago. Wolff, *Ledgers*, 118. Email correspondence, Jane Isbell Haynes to Jack Elliott, March 15, 2012.

given the facts associated with the Jane Taylor Cook window in Oxford.

Regarding Mrs. Francisco's purported hatred of Faulkner, it is difficult to believe that a sane person could harbor such rancor that she would not acknowledge having known him over two decades after his death, decades during which any resentment would have probably faded, likely hastened by an appreciation of Faulkner's international renown. Second, if she did maintain a pathological hatred of Faulkner, it would seemingly have been difficult to maintain her composure during a meeting where the discussion must have centered on the object of her scorn. It also seems improbable that she would have countenanced the Faulkner story's being told during tours of her own home. Third, as noted, Mrs. Francisco was not the only person in attendance at the meeting; there were also her niece and her sister, neither of whom knew about Faulkner's having been at McCarroll Place. Did they also bear a pathological hatred for him? If Mrs. Francisco was in fact suppressing a hatred for Faulkner, perhaps her sister and niece might have humored her by not saying anything that might upset her. But if this was the case I think that Doxey and Tate would have had the courtesy to pull Haynes aside and explain the situation to her, that is that we cannot openly talk about this in front of Ruth, but yes, Faulkner did come here often. It especially seems strange for Tate to inform Haynes of the etching, effectively set up her visit, and yet say nothing about a connection with William Faulkner if in fact there had been one.

Finally there are the observations of Hubert McAlexander, which are of considerable importance considering his unique background relating to Holly Springs and Faulkner. This background provides weight to his grave doubts about the veracity of the Francisco testimony: "When the book [*Ledgers*] was published, I was contacted by friends, many of whom thought the study was a hoax based on their own intelligent readings of the book. Everything I knew from having grown up in Holly Springs added to that conclusion."¹⁰⁸ Regarding Francisco's claim that his father had regularly hunted with Faulkner,¹⁰⁹ McAlexander writes:

I knew Edgar Wiggin Francisco, Jr. ... He was a short, small, and very gentle man. When I asked the son of Janis Tyler Calame to inquire of her whether Mr. Francisco had ever been a hunter, she replied, 'No. Far from it.' Born in the nineteen

¹⁰⁸ Email correspondence, Hubert H. McAlexander to Jack Elliott, March 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 10, 68-69, 77-79.

teens and still very alert, she is the niece of Harvey McCroskey, a contemporary and lifelong friend of Mr. Francisco. Her statement supported my impression of the man. Neither did I ever hear that he was a friend of the writer William Faulkner.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, he goes so far as to say: “Finally someone has shown that the emperor is wearing no clothes. So it appears that the whole story now in wide circulation through radio, national newspapers, scholarly presses and journals is a complete hoax. Those in the Faulkner literary establishment who supported and applauded this fraud owe the public an apology.”¹¹¹ Regarding other Holly Springs natives, I have never found anyone who claims to have heard of the Francisco–Faulkner relationship prior to EWF3’s disclosures.¹¹² If the Franciscos were so traumatized that they wanted to bury, silence, and obscure any linkage to Faulkner, it appears that they did a good job; there is no evidence to be found.

Yoknapatawpha Apocalypse ... or Apocrypha?

The Francisco testimony leads the reader into a world that initially appears as a mosaic of randomly recalled events that coalesce into a seemingly forgotten and formative portion of Faulkner’s life. This is the dream-like world of McCarroll Place where the writer frequently dropped by with his beer—and possibly a couple of dead squirrels to

¹¹⁰ Email correspondence, Hubert H. McAlexander to Jack Elliott, March 18, 2014.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Milton Winter is a historian and pastor at Holly Springs Presbyterian Church and a former resident of McCarroll Place; he knows nothing about a Francisco–Faulkner connection. Email correspondence, Milton Winter to Jack Elliott, July 8, 2013. While Henry Fort Gholson (1920–1989) was a friend and hunting companion of Faulkner, his children Bea Gholson Greene and Harris Gholson II know nothing about the Francisco connection. Frank Hurdle records Greene saying that “she remembers her father hunting a number of times with Faulkner and her parents getting together with the Faulknors for dinner. They first met in the mid- to late-1950s while Faulkner’s nephew, Jimmy Faulkner, was building their house. She knew absolutely nothing of the Francisco friendship.” Hurdle, “Hurdle on Faulkner: The Holly Springs Connection.” Hurdle also presents the observations of an anonymous source: “It would amaze me if Edgar and Faulkner were friends. He was just not the type that you would expect to hang out with a bohemian like Faulkner. He was a meek, mild little man; and Miss Ruth, she’s not the type that I would expect to allow any carrying-ons in that house.” Quoted in Hurdle, “Hurdle on Faulkner: The Holly Springs Connection.” Chelius Carter, current director of the Marshall County Historical Museum, was also unable to find anyone who knew of the Francisco–Faulkner connection. Email correspondence, Chelius Carter to Jack Elliott, November 25, 2013.

cook—to listen attentively as Edgar Francisco tells and retells the same stories. There Faulkner would find the characters and incidents that he would copy in minute detail into his work. After listening to the usual round of stories, he goes to the ledgers and continues adding to his already voluminous notes, impressive compilations of trivia that would be translated into literary masterpieces. The note-taking abruptly ends when he flies into a rage, cursing an unseen presence. Ruth Francisco looks on in seething disapproval, offended not so much by the bizarre outburst as by the cold beer sitting insolently in open view; she resolves that in future years Faulkner's name would never be mentioned in her home—no matter how famous he might become. Shaken as though by a nightmare, the small boy runs to his bedroom locking the door behind him and vowing that he will never come out. He eventually suppresses the memory of the event and of the literary genius who found his inspiration there; with the passage of time all was forgotten ... almost.

To a large degree the surreal atmosphere derives from the feeling that one has entered a parallel universe where some things seem familiar yet little meshes with the world that we know. Faulkner may appear, yet he is shorn of his personal connections to Oxford. On the other hand, Edgar never ventures into Faulkner's world at Oxford so no one recalls him and his friendship with the author, nor do they recall the formative role that McCarroll Place had in the development of the writer's fiction. Faulkner and Edgar inhabit a world to themselves, as the younger Francisco recalled, like "the last two surviving members of a secret order."¹¹³ But after lying hidden for decades, the boy who had willfully forgotten, now a man, had recovered and revealed the dream world in its apocalyptic portent, a portent aptly summarized by Lois Swaney Shipp, then director of the Marshall County Historical Museum when she proclaimed not without amazement that "Faulkner's great imagination began with our local happenings"¹¹⁴ and that "most of ... [his] stories came from Edgar Francisco's grandpa's ledgers and diaries. So maybe Holly Springs was Faulkner's 'Yoknapatawpha,' not anywhere else."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 176.

¹¹⁴ Lois Swaney Shipp, "Museuming: Visit Eddie Francisco May 11," *South Reporter*, 12 May 2011, accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.southreporter.com/2011/wk19/society.html>.

¹¹⁵ Lois Swaney Shipp, "Museuming: New Window Installed at Museum," *South Reporter*, 19 May 2011. Accessed November 25, 2013, <http://www.southreporter.com/2011/>

When I first encountered the Francisco testimony the overall strangeness of the narrative provoked an inchoate uneasiness.¹¹⁶ My initial impression was supported by subsequent investigations that cast doubt on the claim regarding the original provenance of the ledgers and upon the overall credibility of Edgar Francisco III. Given the duration of the purported friendship between Faulkner and Edgar Francisco Jr., one would expect there to be corroborating evidence, yet none was found. In fact there is nothing that even suggests a linkage between Faulkner and McCarroll Place, that is, not until the appearance of the story told for pilgrimage tours that suggested Faulkner had been to McCarroll Place and what he experienced there had shaped his work. This story defined the essence of Francisco's testimony, which appeared as an ever-growing, amorphous expansion upon the theme. After a bit of background reading in the appropriate works, he could tell and retell Ludie's story in a manner that would echo Faulkner's writing and even incorporate other "influences" from McCarroll Place. So, as the story developed, Faulkner had not only been to McCarroll Place and seen the etching, he had also been a familiar figure in the Francisco household for decades where he was influenced by Edgar Francisco's stories; he was influenced by events in and around the house; he was influenced by the Strickland cousins next door, who were the models for the Compson family;¹¹⁷ and of course he was influenced by the ledgers. Additionally, the story provided endless fodder for others to look for and even find—so to speak—previously undiscovered Faulknerian influences.¹¹⁸ What began as a speculative story to titillate tourists evolved into nothing less than the apocalypse of a formative nexus in Faulkner's experience; a chapter of history once suppressed and forgotten is now recovered for all to see and be amazed by.

Francisco's apocalypse falls into two categories: first there are the

wk20/society.html.

¹¹⁶ Despite my reaction to the Francisco testimony, many of the Faulkner experts seem to accept it at face value; at any rate, few have openly questioned it. Furthermore, the manuscript of *Ledgers* passed through a professional review process, leaving one to wonder where the critical judgment was that should have prevented a tale with such ramifications from going to press without a shred of corroboration.

¹¹⁷ Wolff, *Ledgers*, 61-62.

¹¹⁸ For example at the 2012 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, a paper session entitled "William Faulkner, the Francis Terry Leak Ledgers, and the Forms of History" was devoted to uncovering the influence of the ledgers on the writer. Apparently no one questioned the underlying assumption that he had actually seen the ledgers.

parts that are subject to examination in the light of external evidence. In these cases the testimony has proven to be improbable if not demonstrably false. Second, there are the parts that fall outside the realm of external evidence. For these one can only rely upon the credibility of the witness. However, given that the testimony of the first part has proven to be dubious, how much credibility is left that would support the balance of the testimony? At best Francisco's testimony is unreliable; at worst it is a total fabrication.

I was once inclined to believe that there might be a core of truth in the testimony. Now I am not so inclined. There is no reason outside of the testimony itself to believe that Faulkner used the ledgers; there is no reason to believe that he was a friend of Edgar Francisco Jr.; and there is no reason to believe that he modeled his Yoknapatawpha stories on his experiences at McCarroll Place. I am inclined though to see the testimony with its extravagant claims, not as "one of the most sensational literary discoveries of recent decades,"¹¹⁹ but as one of the most sensational literary frauds of recent decades. In the end the story of Faulkner at McCarroll Place appears to be not so much apocalypse as apocrypha.

¹¹⁹ John Lowe quoted in Cohen, "Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered."